

It's a guy thing: It is essential for men to take charge of their well-being

Nowadays we often hear the word "disclosure" in political news: disclosure of campaign finances, trips abroad and the like. Although I personally do not worry about that phase of political conversation, I constantly worry about the health and well-being of my friends' and neighbors in Montgomery County.

One disclosure I do concern myself with is the public announcement of my battle with prostate cancer and, above all, my gratitude for the scientific advancement of modern medicine, which gives me access to the PSA (prostate specific antigen) test. I feel humbling gladness for the early detection that has saved my life.

Women wear a pink ribbon in support of breast cancer awareness or to indicate their survival from the disease. Men, however, are not likely to wear a symbol of a struggle with prostate or testicular cancer. Yet women and men alike share this medical urgency — early detection saves lives, and testing plus self-examination are two steps every conscientious woman or man can do to become

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proactive partners with their doctors in a yearly schedule of testing and screening.

Women are advised to schedule annual mammograms and Pap tests as constant factors in the upkeep of their health profiles. More men need to be aware of the roles they must play in regard to their adult, male-specific health issues. Good health is essential for a good and happy life, but the gift of good health cannot be taken for granted.

Female friends tell me their anxiety level is high when they go through the physical steps related to mammography and cervical/uterine testing. Then there's that awful waiting time until the test results are given to the patient.

Let's be honest — men go through anxiety big-time in terms of taking on the physical part of the PSA test and rectal exam, then

the waiting time for the results. But the facts of life for men cannot be ignored: statistically, one in three men will have some trouble with his prostate. If a man is of Hispanic or African-American heritage, or if there is a family history of prostate disease, the probability is even higher.

Prostate cancer itself may not be lethal if it is diagnosed and treated early. Thanks to PSA testing, most prostate cancers are now found while they are still confined to the prostate gland. Such early detection gives men several treatment options, including surgery (prostatectomy), external beam radiation, and implantation of radioactive seeds (brachytherapy). The good news is that each option offers a man with localized disease a very good chance of becoming cancer free.

Prostate cancer is specific in its nature to the individual man. As much as it can be slow-growing, it can also be aggressive, fast-growing and fatal. But there is no doubt that modern medical screening and treatment are available and essential to all men. Through-

out the country are medical centers and periodic testing programs, many of which are free of charge for men in need of such help.

It is essential for men to take charge of their personal well-being by committing to and completing the urological tests available to safeguard prostate health. Men who are in the high-risk groups must begin their testing habit by age 40. Fifty is considered the appropriate age for all other men to begin regular testing.

Patterns of behavior within men's social groups are important in terms of education, support and concentrated effort within the community to lift up the health and well-being of its people. Adult males need to protect their own lives in order to be there over the long run for their family. Prostate health is a personal responsibility. So, all you men out there, this is a personal challenge to get yourselves tested.

In the immortal words of Larry the Cable Guy, "Git-R-Done!"

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